DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 444 689 PS 028 758

TITLE	Early Learning: Improving Results for Young Children.
INSTITUTION	Education Commission of the States, Denver, CO.
SPONS AGENCY	Metropolitan Life Foundation.; Charles A. Dana Foundation, New York, NY.
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	33p.; Additionally supported by the Thomas L. Conlan Education Foundation, Cincinnati, Ohio.
AVAILABLE FROM	ECS Distribution Center, 707 17th Street, Suite 2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427; Tel: 303-299-3692; Fax: 303-296-8332; Web site: http://www.ecs.org; e-mail: ecs@ecs.org (Order No. EC-00-01, $5 plus postage and handling).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Change Strategies; *Day Care; *Delivery Systems; Early Childhood Education; Policy Formation; Program Descriptions; *Public Policy; School Business Relationship; *Young Children
IDENTIFIERS	Barriers to Change; *Education Commission of the States; Goals 2000; State Policy

ABSTRACT

Early care and education has been designated as the 2000-2001 focus of the Education Commission of the States (ECS), a nonprofit, nationwide interstate organization that helps governors, legislators, state education officials, and others identify, develop, and implement public policies to improve student learning at all levels. Noting that there is a long way to go before the first of the National Education Goals--that all children will start school ready to learn--is achieved, this report identifies barriers to changing the current "nonsystem" of early care and education and describes ECS's role in addressing this issue. Although many states have invested resources in preschool programs and have taken steps to improve the quality of early care and education programs, the challenge is to knit together the piecemeal efforts to create a well operating system. The 2-year ECS Early Learning Initiative is described as complementing the work of other national organizations by serving the needs of ECS policymaker, education, and business constituencies by: (1) engaging business communities in early learning as an investment in the development of the future workforce; and (2) making systemic connections between early learning and elementary education. The report delineates the goals for the initiative and identifies ways state policymakers, educators, business leaders, parents, and advocates can contribute to and benefit from the initiative. The report concludes with a list of resources and a list of the members of the Early Learning Advisory Council. (KB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

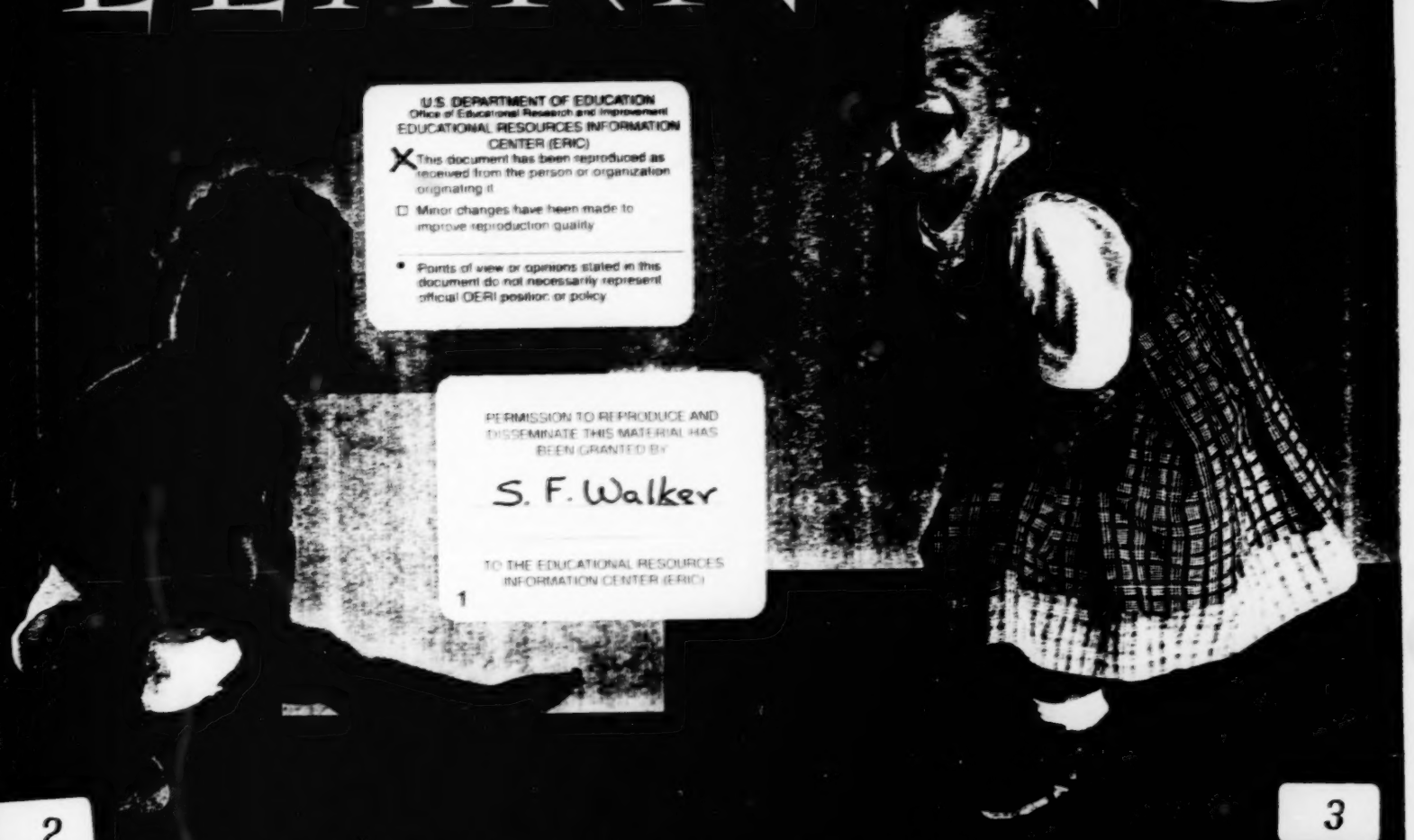
ED 444 689

PS 028758

EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES

ECS

EARLY LEARNING



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. F. Walker

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

2

3

IMPROVING RESULTS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

LETTER FROM THE

Early Learning

Jeanne Shaheen
Governor of New Hampshire
2000-01 ECS Chairman

1

Table of Contents

Letter From Governor Shaheen 1

Introduction 3

ECS' Early Learning Initiative 7

How You Can Benefit 11

Resources 13

GOVERNOR

a marketplace that has not kept pace with their needs or, for that matter, their children's. Among the consequences is the $3 billion annual cost to employers nationally of child-care-related absenteeism.

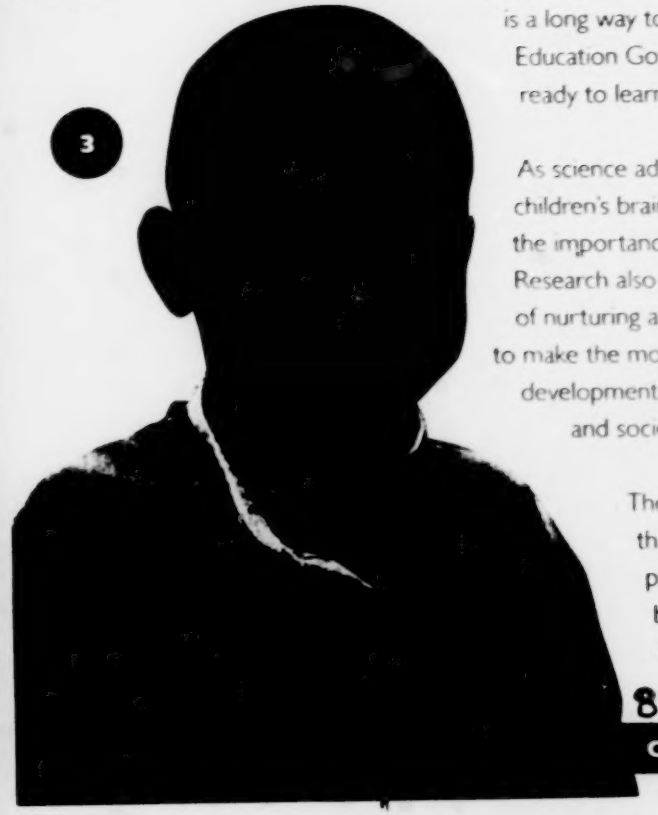
In 1999, I convened the Governor's Business Commission on Child Care and Early Childhood Education to focus the attention of New Hampshire's business leaders on this critical issue and enlist their help in crafting solutions. We learned that, in addition to the cost of absenteeism, gaps in the availability, affordability and quality of child care result in 24% of families reporting that at least one parent had to quit a job and 19% had to switch to part-time work because of child-care responsibilities. We also learned of the less measurable, but no less real, loss of productivity that can be attributed to parents' daily concerns about their children's welfare.

It was this experience in New Hampshire that inspired me to make early care and education the focus of my term as 2000-01 chairman of the Education Commission of the States (ECS). Over the course of the next year, I will work to bring the message about the importance of early learning to a wider audience, to build the partnerships essential to achieving change and to provide the best information available to help policymakers make informed policy choices and wise investment decisions. I will be joined in this effort by a distinguished advisory council of early childhood experts, educators, business leaders, policymakers and others who will lend their considerable expertise and insight to ensuring that this initiative makes a positive difference for young children and their families.

I invite you to join with us in this important undertaking of seeing that all of our children have the best possible start in life.

Jeanne Shaheen

INTRODUCTION



When the National Education Goals were adopted in 1990, they represented a vision of all children entering school ready to learn and all children leaving school ready to succeed. In the intervening years, the nation has devoted considerably more attention and resources to the latter than to the former. Indeed, a 1998 national survey of kindergarten teachers found that barely half their students make the transition to formal schooling without significant difficulties. Clearly, there is a long way to go before the first of the National Education Goals – that all children will start school ready to learn – is achieved.

As science adds to the understanding of how children's brains develop in the first few years of life, the importance of this goal is increasingly apparent. Research also is adding to knowledge about the kind of nurturing and stimulating environment required to make the most of these years of rapid brain development, and the long-term costs to children and society if it is not consistently provided.

There is also abundant research evidence that participation in a high-quality preschool program, starting right after birth or even as late as age 3 or 4, results in significant and lasting benefits, even – or especially – for those children whose family circumstances put them at greatest risk.

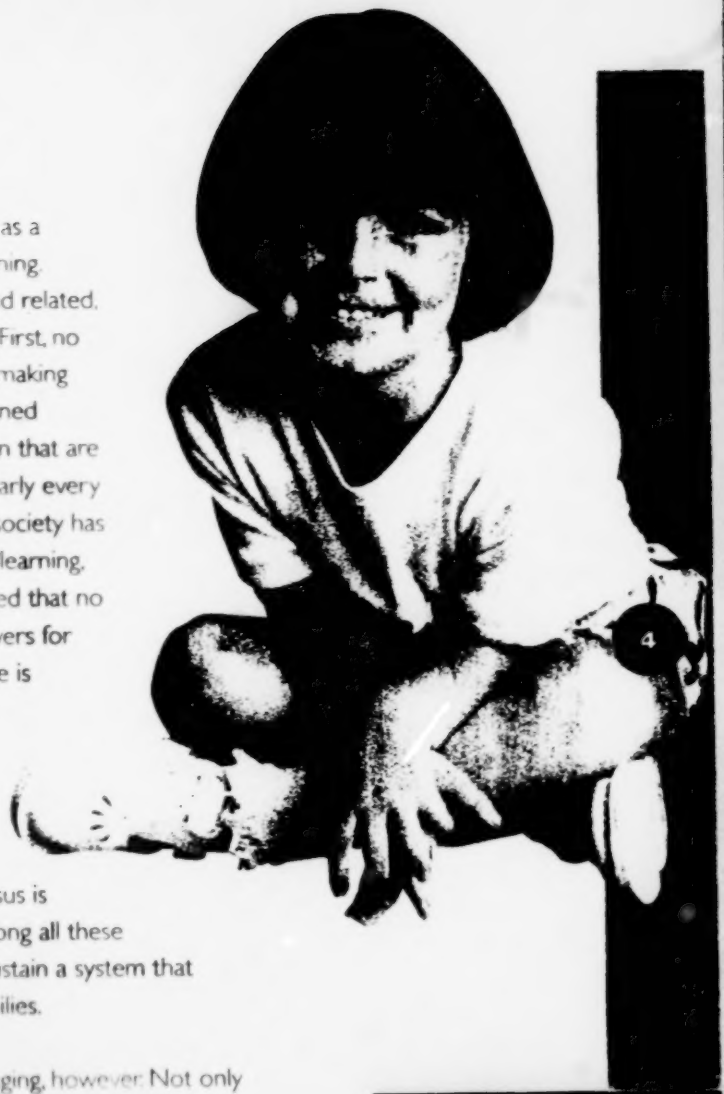
Stay-at-home parents, too, need help to understand and apply the lessons of brain development research to their daily interactions with their children. Yet as so often happens, actions have failed to keep pace with knowledge, and countless children continue to lack the right conditions for sound physical, cognitive, social and emotional development.

While parents are still by far the most important influences in their children's lives, they no longer do the job on their own. With 65% of women with children under the age of 6 in the workforce, nearly two-thirds of preschool-age children – and about one-half of infants and toddlers – spend at least some of their week in care outside the home. Welfare reform has dramatically increased the labor force participation of low-income women, adding to the demand for early care and learning programs that meet their needs. And school reform measures that impose higher standards and accountability for performance are heightening the pressure on elementary schools to ensure that all children succeed, even those who arrive at their doors ill-prepared. Thus, the availability, cost and quality of child care and preschool programs have taken on added significance in shaping early childhood outcomes and school readiness.

Unfortunately, the current state of early care and learning programs is deeply flawed:

- **Despite significant increases in federal funding, the aggregate capacity of Head Start, child-care subsidies and related programs still falls far short of serving all those eligible.**
- **Part-day, part-year programs such as the traditional Head Start model no longer meet the needs of parents working full time.**
- **Child-care quality studies report that most programs are of mediocre quality at best, and an alarming proportion are of such poor quality as to threaten the well-being of children.**
- **While many employers are involved in early care and learning in some fashion, they typically view it as a family issue, in contrast to the way they view K-12 education reform – as an investment in the quality of their future workforce.**
- **There is a striking disconnect between the world of early care and learning and the more formal K-12 education system, with a lack of alignment of learning expectations for children, little collaboration on professional development, discontinuities in curriculum and the classroom environment, and scant attention to helping children and parents make smooth transitions.**

In short, many describe what exists as a "nonsystem" for early care and learning. There are at least two significant, and related, obstacles to changing this situation. First, no one really "owns" this set of issues, making it difficult to focus the kind of sustained attention and commitment to action that are required to effect change. While nearly every level of government and sector of society has a stake in improving early care and learning, the responsibilities are so fragmented that no single actor holds enough of the levers for change to get it done. Second, there is no broad consensus in society on the appropriate roles of families, government, employers, various types of early learning providers and communities. The only real consensus is that some form of partnership among all these players is required to create and sustain a system that works for all children and their families.



The picture is not entirely discouraging, however. Not only has the federal government increased funding, but state governments, businesses and local communities also have

The challenge is to knit together piecemeal efforts

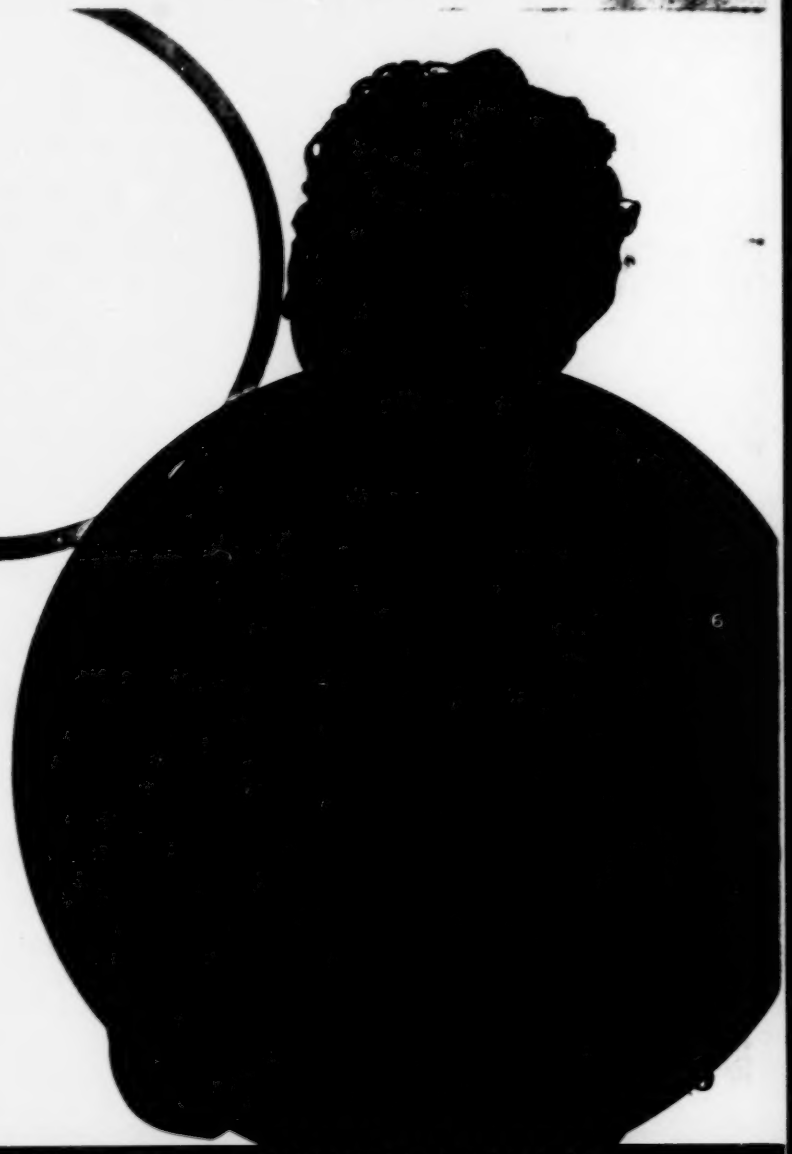
become much more active in forging partnerships to expand access, improve quality, support families and create stable sources of financing for early care and learning. More than 40 states invest state resources in preschool programs, usually targeted to at-risk children, and several provide universal access to at least one year of preschool.

Most states also have taken steps to improve the quality of early care and learning through higher standards for licensing, investments in staff education and training, incentives for accreditation and/or increased reimbursement rates. A growing number of employers are responding to intense competition for qualified workers by adopting flexible policies and expanding benefit programs to help working parents. And numerous communities across the nation are forming public-private partnerships to assess the needs in their communities and develop early learning strategies that will improve results for young children.

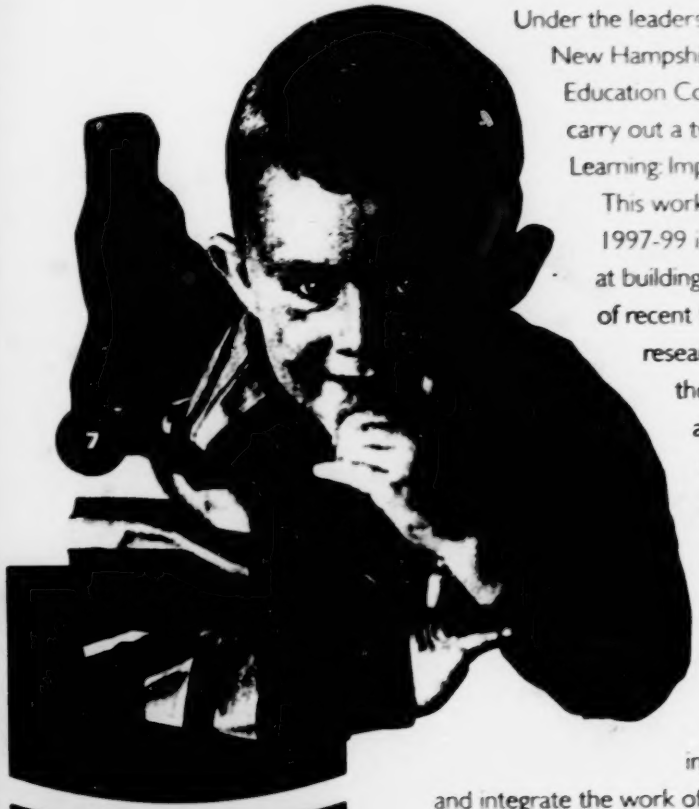
The challenge is to knit together these piecemeal efforts to create a system that will do the following:

- **Ensure that all young children benefit from a quality early learning environment**
- **Provide parents with the information and tools they need to fulfill their role as their children's first and most important teachers and make informed choices about the child-care arrangements and preschool programs they select for their children**

- Address the education, professional development and compensation shortcomings of the early care and learning profession in order to attract and retain qualified, motivated employees
- Create a financing system that blends public and private resources in such a way that parents' choices of early care and learning settings are driven by their preferences and their children's needs rather than by the source of funds they depend upon
- Provide incentives for early care and learning programs to meet high-quality standards and be accountable for their performance
- Forge strong connections between early care and learning programs and elementary schools so they work together to facilitate smooth transitions into kindergarten and beyond
- Build lasting partnerships among government, schools, business, early childhood providers and other community agencies so that each is accountable to the others for fulfilling its agreed-upon roles in creating and sustaining an early care and learning system that meets the needs of all children.



ECS' EARLY LEARNI



Under the leadership of its 2000-01 chairman, New Hampshire Governor Jeanne Shaheen, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) will carry out a two-year initiative entitled Early Learning: Improving Results for Young Children. This work will build on ECS' experience in 1997-99 in sponsoring 33 workshops aimed at building awareness among state policymakers of recent findings in brain development research and stimulating consideration of their implications for policies, programs and practices. These workshops were, in the main, successful in achieving these objectives and have fueled a growing demand among ECS' constituents for assistance in translating early learning research into practice.

The agenda for the early learning initiative is designed to complement and integrate the work of other national organizations engaged in early childhood policy and program development by serving the needs of ECS' policymaker, educator and business constituencies. Accordingly, the initiative will bring special focus to two aspects of early care and education that have received relatively scant attention from state policymakers and to which ECS' capabilities can add the most value:

- **Engaging the business community in early learning as an investment in the development of the future workforce and the attainment of the K-12 reform goals which business has advanced, in addition to its significance as a work-family and employee-benefits issue. With business as a full partner, the broad-based state and community partnerships necessary to bring greater coherence and effectiveness to the nation's early care and learning "nonsystem" will become more potent forces for change.**

- **Making systemic connections between early learning programs and elementary education to provide continuity and successful transitions for children and families, thus enlarging the scope of education reform to encompass learning from the very start. Both early learning providers and elementary educators have much to gain from collaboration and much to offer one another.**

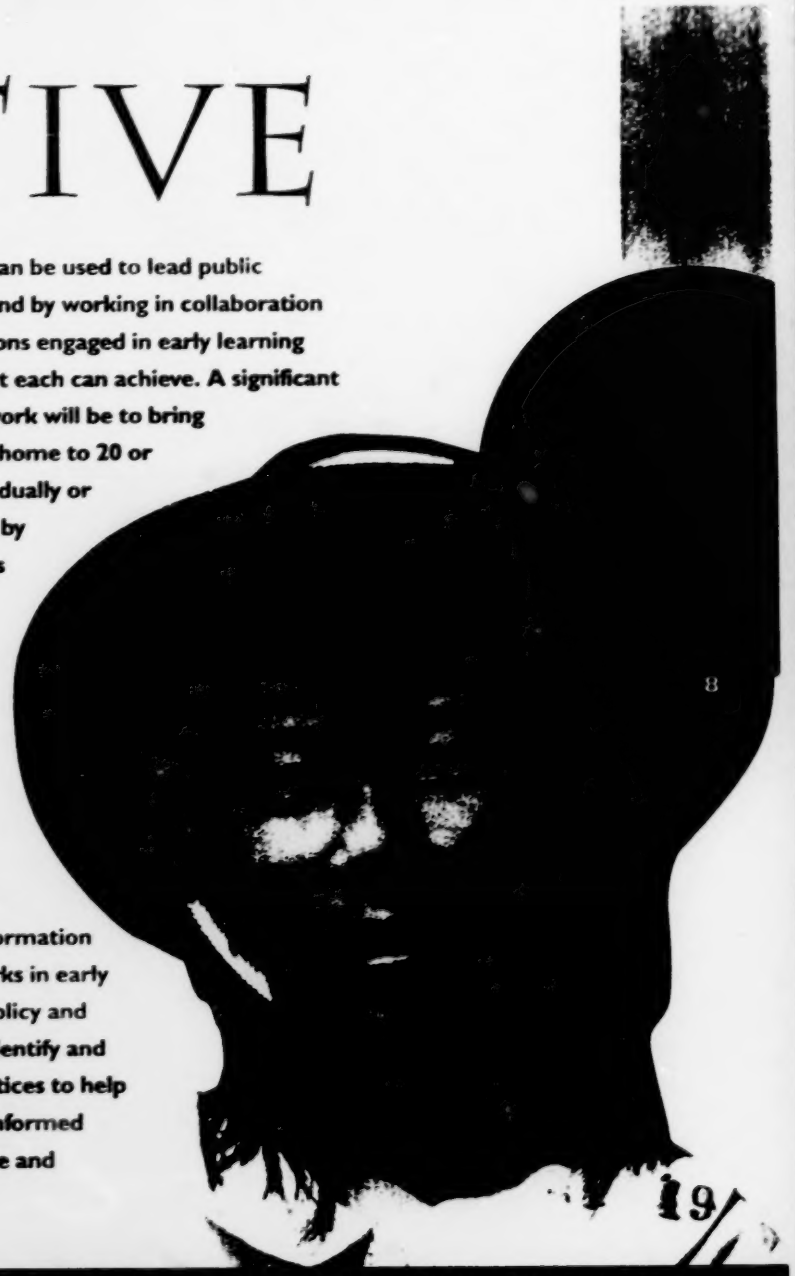
NG INITIATIVE

Although ECS' work will focus on these two areas in particular, it also will seek to provide useful information on the other dimensions of early care and learning with which state policymakers must wrestle – expanding access to preschool, improving quality in early care and education, supporting families and other caregivers, financing early childhood programs and fostering the development of effective partnerships. ECS will build on its 35-year track record of serving state policymakers by synthesizing available information, making it available in useful ways and helping policymakers translate good practice into good policy.

The workplan for the early learning initiative focuses on activities and services designed to achieve three goals:

- **Expand and enrich the national dialogue about early care and education. Governor Shaheen will focus on reaching out to governors, legislators, business leaders, education leaders and organizations representing parents and early childhood professionals. The goal will be to expand and strengthen partnerships to transform America's incomplete and fragmented efforts on early learning into a coherent system that works for children, families and the people who work with them. ECS will supplement the governor's efforts by producing effective print and electronic publications and other tools that can be used to lead public engagement efforts, and by working in collaboration with other organizations engaged in early learning to leverage the impact each can achieve. A significant component of ECS' work will be to bring the national dialogue home to 20 or so states, either individually or in regional groupings, by sponsoring workshops designed to jump-start or accelerate state-level strategy development on early learning.**

- **Give state policymakers and business leaders easy access to the best information available on what works in early care and education policy and programs. ECS will identify and share promising practices to help policymakers make informed decisions about where and**



how to invest limited resources in early care and learning. Drawing on and augmenting the best information available from other sources, ECS will create a "one-stop shopping" page on its Web site. This early learning area will enable users to access the latest data and research findings, descriptions of exemplary programs, information on what other states are doing, and guidance on the characteristics of effective early childhood policies and programs. This issue site will be launched in July 2000 at www.ecs.org. The initial content will be supplemented throughout the two-year project period and beyond. Interactive features will be incorporated to host discussion forums and gather feedback that will be used to enhance the site's value.

9

Provide in-depth technical assistance to selected states to advance their early learning policy and investment agendas. ECS will establish and maintain a longer-term collaborative relationship with three to five states committed to formulating and carrying out an ambitious early care and learning agenda. States will be selected to represent different points along the spectrum of experience in wrestling with the challenges of transforming early childhood policies, programs and practices. ECS will work with each state to assess the current status of early care and learning, convene the appropriate stakeholders, build consensus around goals and objectives, and develop and

implement action plans. ECS will provide technical assistance, including engaging experts on particular early learning issues, drawing on its growing information resources on promising practices, arranging site visits to exemplary programs, leveraging its national partnerships to recruit partners in the participating states and facilitating peer networking with counterparts in other states.

In addition to the above activities, ECS will sponsor sessions on early care and learning at its annual National Forum, Steering Committee meetings and other ECS-sponsored events throughout the two-year effort and beyond. By the end of the two years, ECS expects to have achieved and/or contributed to the following outcomes:

- **Increased awareness, partnership development and collaboration around issues of early care and learning in at least 20 states**
- **Significant progress in developing and implementing early care and learning strategies in three to five states**
- **Increased business engagement in early care and learning issues**
- **Stronger linkages between early learning and K-12 education**
- **Better-informed decisionmaking by policymakers who use ECS' Web site and other information resources**

- **Within ECS, institutionalization of ongoing expertise and assistance resources targeted to early care and learning as a fundamental component of ECS' mission.**

The agenda for the early learning initiative is designed to complement and integrate the work of other national organizations

HOW YOU CAN B

While ECS targets its services to its primary constituency of policymakers in member states, there are many ways that other stakeholders in early care and learning can participate in – and benefit from – this initiative. Here are just some of the actions you can take, as an ECS member, educator, business leader, parent or advocate:

11

Visit ECS' early learning issue page at www.ecs.org

State Policymakers

- **Visit ECS' early learning issue page at www.ecs.org, and do it often. Recommend new content and participate in online discussions.**
- **Participate in early learning sessions at the ECS annual meeting and other ECS events.**
- **Invite ECS to co-sponsor an early learning workshop in your state.**
- **Invite Governor Shaheen, ECS staff and/or members of the Early Learning Advisory Council to speak at appropriate events in your state.**
- **Propose your state as one of the sites for in-depth technical assistance from ECS.**
- **Form high-level state partnerships to engage all stakeholders in improving access and quality in early care and learning.**
- **Call on ECS for advice and assistance in recruiting partners, using its information on promising practices, assessing options for legislative action or other tasks you wish to accomplish.**

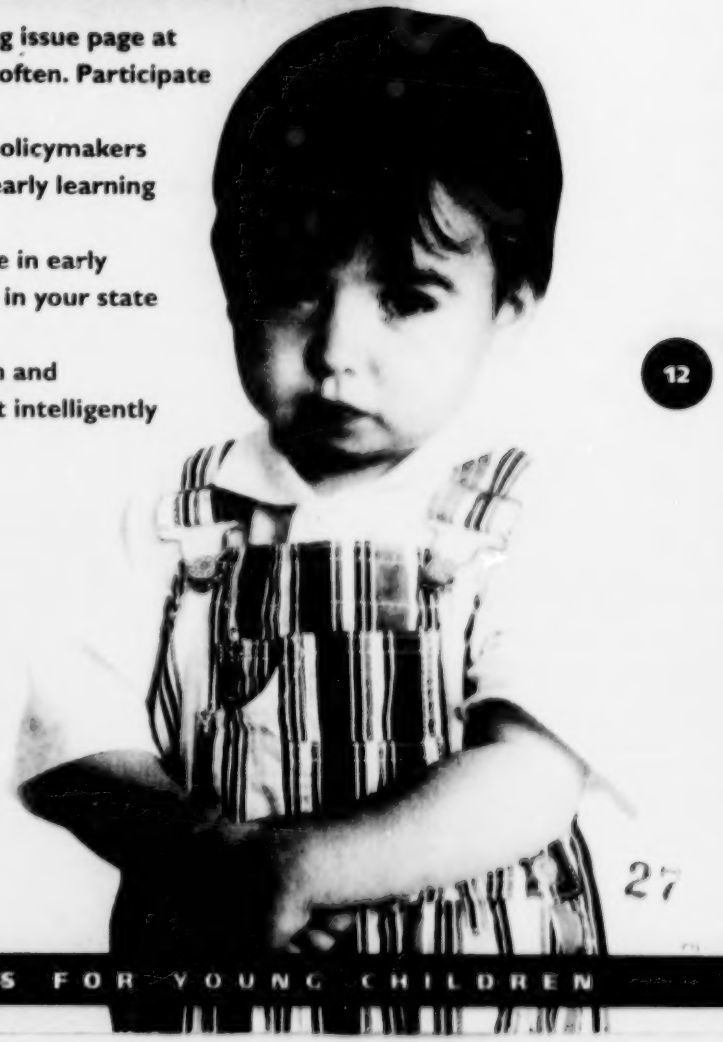
ENEFIT

Early Childhood and Elementary Educators

- **Visit ECS' early learning issue page at www.ecs.org, and do it often. Participate in online discussions.**
- **Ask your state policymakers to participate in ECS' early learning initiative.**
- **Participate in early childhood partnerships in your state or community.**
- **Work on building linkages between early care and learning and K-12 education in your state or community.**
- **Advocate policy and program initiatives in your state that will help improve quality and access.**

Business Leaders, Parents and Advocates

- **Visit ECS' early learning issue page at www.ecs.org, and do it often. Participate in online discussions.**
- **Encourage your state policymakers to participate in ECS' early learning initiative.**
- **Support and participate in early childhood partnerships in your state or community.**
- **Advocate for legislation and appropriations to invest intelligently in early learning.**



RESOURCES

- Education Commission of the States – **www.ecs.org**
- Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Care and Head Start Bureaus – **www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/ccb** and **www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb**
- Child Care Action Campaign – **www.childcareaction.org**
- Child Care Partnership Project – **www.nccic.org/ccpartnerships**
- Children's Defense Fund – **www.childrensdefense.org**
- Committee for Economic Development – **www.ced.org**
- Council of Chief State School Officers – **www.ccsso.org**
- David and Lucile Packard Foundation's The Future of Children – **www.futureofchildren.org**
- ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education – **www.ericeece.org**
- Families and Work Institute – **www.familiesandwork.org**
- I Am Your Child Campaign – **www.iamyourchild.org**
- Lifetime Television Caring for Kids – **www.lifetimetv.com/parenting**
- National Alliance of Business – **www.nab.com**
- National Association for the Education of Young Children – **www.naeyc.org**
- National Center for Early Development and Learning – **www.fpg.unc.edu/~NCEDL**
- National Child Care Information Center – **www.nccic.org**
- National Conference of State Legislatures – **www.ncsl.org**
- National Education Goals Panel – **www.negp.gov**
- National Governors' Association Center for Best Practices – **www.nga.org/CBP/activities/ChildrenNFamilies.asp**
- National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education – **www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/ECI**
- Success By 6 – **www.unitedway.org/successby6**
- Zero to Three – **www.zerotothree.org**

Early Learning Advisory Council

ECS' Early Learning initiative is being guided by a distinguished panel of early childhood experts and ECS commissioners:

- **Jeanne Shaheen, Governor of New Hampshire and 2000-01 ECS Chairman**
- **Vicki Boyd, Liaison and Special Assistant for Education to Governor Shaheen**
- **Ellen Galinsky, President, Families and Work Institute**
- **Sharon Lynn Kagan, Senior Associate, Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy, Yale University, and President, National Association for the Education of Young Children**
- **Robin Karr-Morse, Co-Author, *Ghosts from the Nursery***
- **Andrea Kemp, Lifetime Television**
- **R. Jan LeCroy, ECS Commissioner, Texas**
- **Hazel E. Loucks, Deputy Governor for Education and Workforce Development, Illinois**
- **Doug Price, Chairman of the Board, Educare Colorado**
- **Doug Racine, Lieutenant Governor and President of the Senate, Vermont**

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Jeanne Shaheen, Governor of New Hampshire
2000-01 ECS Chairman

Center for Mathematics and Science Education
University of Texas at Austin

Education Foundation

Metropolitan Life Foundation

14

The Charles A. Dana Foundation, New York, New York
The Thomas L. Conlan Education Foundation
Cincinnati, Ohio

30

31

EARLY LEARNING IMPROVING RESULTS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

© Copyright 2000 by the Education Commission of the States (ECS). All rights reserved.

The Education Commission of the States is a nonprofit, nationwide interstate organization that helps governors, legislators, state education officials and others identify, develop and implement public policies to improve student learning at all levels. It is ECS policy to take affirmative action to prevent discrimination in its policies, programs and employment practices.

Copies of this paper, Early Learning: Improving Results for Young Children, are available for $5 plus postage and handling from the:
ECS Distribution Center • 707 17th Street, Suite 2700 • Denver, Colorado 80202-3427 • 303-299-3692.
Ask for No. EC-00-01. ECS accepts prepaid orders, American Express MasterCard and Visa. All sales are final.

To request permission to excerpt part of this publication, either in print or electronically,
please fax Josie Canales at 303-296-8332 or e-mail: jcanales@ecs.org.